Functioning of public sector steel plants

*143. SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) what steps have been taken to improve the functioning of the public sector steel units in the country;

(b) what percentage of equity share has been disinvested in these units;

(c) whether there is any proposal to disinvest these units; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI BRAJ KISHORE TRIPATHY): (a) A number of measures have been taken to improve the performance of Public Sector Steel Plants under Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) and Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) which *inter-alia* include financial and business restructuring, cost control, market oriented product mix, increasing sales network, implementation of voluntary retirement scheme, improving techno-economics and ensuring motivation/skill improvement of the workforce through training.

(b) While Government has disinvested 14.18% of its equity in SAIL, in case of RINL no disinvestment of Government equity has taken place so far.

(c) and (d) There is no proposal to further disinvest Government's equity in SAIL at present. However for its wholly owned subsidiary *i.e.* IISCO, process of its conversion into a joint venture company has been initiated with SAIL holding minority stake.

In case of RINL, Disinvestment Commission have proposed disinvestment of not less than 51% of its equity to as strategic buyer after writing off of the entire accumulated losses of the company as on 31.3.1999.

Retirement age of employees of ports

†*144. SHRI D. P. YADAV: Will the Minister of SHIPPING be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are contemplating to bring down the retirement age of employees in order to reduce the excess labour force and make the ports financially more competitive; and

(b) if so, by when?

† Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.